

Les dernières volontés de Jeremy Bentham

(15 février 1748- 6 juin 1832)

sources :

- C.F.A. Marmoy, « [The 'Auto-Icon' of Jeremy Bentham at University College, London](#) », *Medical History*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, April 1958, pp. 77-86.
- [preservedproject.co.uk](#), « [Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living](#) », Jeremy Bentham, 1832 (not published)
- [The National Archives](#), Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU

Testament de 1769 (extraits)

Intégralité du testament

It is my Will and special request to my Executor that if I should chance to die of any such disease as that in the judgment of my said Exor the art of surgery or science of Physic should be likely to be in any wise advanced by observations to be made on the opening of my body (...)

This my will and special request I make, not out of affectation of singularity, but to the intent and with the desire that mankind may reap some small benefit in and by my decease, having hitherto had small opportunities to contribute thereto while living.

Testament du 30 mai 1832 (extraits)

Queen Square Place, Westminster, Wednesday, 30 May 1832.

My body I give to my dear friend Doctor Southwood Smith to be disposed of in manner hereinafter mentioned And I direct that as soon as it appears to any one that my life is at an end my executor or any other person by whom on the opening of this paper the contents thereof shall have been observed shall send an express with information of my decease to Doctor Southwood Smith requesting him to repair to the place where my body is lying and after ascertaining by appropriate experiment that no life remains it is my request that he will take my body under his charge and take the requisite and appropriate measures for the disposal and preservation of the several parts of my bodily frame in the manner expressed



in the paper annexed to this my will and at the top of which I have written

'Auto-Icon' The skeleton he will cause to be put together in such manner as that the whole figure may be seated in a Chair usually occupied by me when living in the attitude in which I am sitting when engaged in thought in the course of the time employed in writing I direct that the body thus prepared shall be transferred to my executor He will cause the skeleton to be clad in one of the suits of black occasionally worn by me The Body so clothed together with the chair and the staff in my later years borne by me he will take charge of And for containing the whole apparatus he will cause to be prepared an appropriate box or case and will cause to be engraved in conspicuous characters on a plate to be affixed thereon and also on the labels on the glass cases in which the preparations of the soft parts of my body shall be contained as for example as in the manner used in the case of wine decanters my name at length with the letters ob. followed by the day of my decease If it should so happen that my personal friends and other Disciples should be disposed to meet together on some day or days of the year for the purpose of commemorating the Founder of the greatest happiness system of morals and legislation my executor will from time to time cause to be conveyed to the room in which they meet the said Box or case with the contents there to be stationed in such part of the room as to the assembled company shall seem meet ...

Auto-Icon (13 avril 1830)

Document annexé au testament de 1832

What follows in a hand different from mine was drawn up some little time ago at my desire by Dr Southwood Smith M.D. Witness my hand-JEREMY BENTHAM The manner in which Mr Bentham's body is to be disposed of after his death The Head is to be prepared according to the specimen which Mr Bentham has seen and approved of The Body is to be used as the means of illustrating a series of lectures to which scientific & literary men are to be invited These lectures are to expound the situation structure & functions of the different organs the arrangement & distribution of vessels & whatever may illustrate the mechanism by which the actions of the animal economy - - are performed the object of these lectures being two fold first to communicate curious interesting & highly important knowledge & secondly to show that the primitive horror at dissection originates in ignorance & is kept up by misconception and that the human body when dissected instead of being an object of disgust is as much more beautiful than any other piece of mechanism as it is more curious and wonderful After such lectures have been given those organs which are capable of being preserved for example the heart the kidney &c &c to be prepared in whatever manner may be conceived to render their preservation the most perfect and durable And finally when all the soft parts have been disposed of the bones are to be formed into a skeleton which after the head prepared in the manner already stated has been attached to it is to be dressed in the clothes usually worn by Mr Bentham & in this manner to be perpetually preserved-April 18 1830 Read the above Neither the said Doctor Smith nor any other person being present Read over & approved Witness my hand -JEREMY BENTHAM- To my executor accordingly whoever he may be it is strict injunction that as soon as ever

the fact of my death is ascertained he shall take whatever measures may be necessary for the placing of my body with all practicable promptitude in the hands of the said Dr Smith or in the event of his absence from London in the hands of any person whom he may have appointed for that purpose and that accordingly my body shall be conveyed to his house wherever it may be At present it is in Broad Street City of London to this my bequest I hope no member of my family will make any opposition Should any such opposition be made I charge my executor and enjoin him by all the affection he feels for me not to pay any regard for it- J.B.-

Auto-Icon; or, Farther Uses of the Dead to the Living.
A Fragment. From the Mss. of Jeremy Bentham (not published), 1832

(...) Various are the means by which animal bodies have been preserved for ages. Bruce speaks of the bodies of men which he found in the torrid regions of Africa: and Acerbi mentions the preservation of part of the body of a Mammoth in the ice of the poles. Human bodies were discovered in the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii. In rocks, antediluvian animals are often seen; and from boghs, impregnated with tannine matter, beings of the human race have been not unfrequently brought to light.

Every fact of this sort furnishes valuable materials for thought: but all these facts are the result of accident – not of intention. Those who lived contemporaneously with the lifetime of these remains thought not of futurity, or of any use of which the dead might become to the living.

In process of time, however, the dead have been turned by the living to beneficial account. Their bodies, delivered to anatomists, have become important subjects for physiological, chirurgical, and medical study. From the examination of the insensible dead, alleviation and healing have been communicated to the susceptible living: and in this, the groundwork is laid of more extensive benefits.

These cases are exceptions; for, generally, in the present state of things, our dead relations are a source of evil – and not of good: the fault is not theirs, but ours.

They are nuisances – and we make them so: they generate infectious disease; they send forth the monster, Typhus, to destroy; – we may prevent this. Why do we not prevent it?

They levy on us needless contributions: undertaker, lawyer, priest – ostentation, present a compensation: but in the case of the poor, often are the savings of a family thrown into the grave, – relations left destitute, creditors defrauded.

So much for evil done – and now for good prevented: of the dead a certain number might have served the living: knight's service, no – what end of utility is in that? but surgeon's service – yes! – and the utility is immense.

Immense as it is, far wider is the field of possible usefulness. As in the progress of time, instruction has been given to make 'every man his own broker,' or 'every man his own lawyer:' so now may every man be his own statue. Every man is his best biographer. This is a truth, whose recognition has been followed by volumes of most delightful instruction. Auto-Icon – is a word I have created. It is self-explanatory.

Two objects have been proposed: 1. a transitory, which I shall call anatomical, or dissectional: 2. a permanent, – say a conservative, or statuary. (...)

For many a year the subject has been a favourite one at my table. I have disposed of my own body after death. By that disposal I shall have made to the fund of human happiness a contribution, more or less considerable. This is no hasty, – no recent determination. In 1769, on coming of age, I left my body for dissection. The will was deposited in the hands of Chamberlain Clark, at whose death it was returned to the testator, when not only its contents, but its existence had escaped the testator's memory.

As regards anatomical purposes, one body serves for instruction nearly as well as another; but the head of each individual is peculiar to him, and, when properly preserved, is better than a statue.

The usage of the New Zealanders in reference to the preservation of their friends, is scarcely unknown to any one in Great Britain.

Rambling over the whole field of thought and action, – not to speak specially of that part which constitutes the field of art and science, – in quest of matter and means for adding to the common stock of human happiness, it occurred to me that civilized man might be benefited by an application of this savage ingenuity. (...) Experiments have been making in this country, which promise complete success, by the slow exhaustion of the moisture from the human head. Specimens exist in the College of Physicians. In colour only is there any considerable change; and colour may be easily supplied.

The eyes present no difficulty. Eyes have long been manufactured not distinguishable from those which nature makes.

It is not proposed to coerce people into the adoption of Auto-Iconism; but that, with the consent of parties concerned, the mass of matter which death has created, be disposed of with a view to the felicity of mankind, – in a word, to the best advantage, – the comparatively incorruptible part converted to an Auto-Icon, – the soft and corruptible parts employed for the purpose of anatomical instruction, (...).

What resemblance, what painting, what statue of a human being can be so like him, as in the character of the Auto-Icon, he or she will be to himself or herself. Is not identity preferable to similitude? (...)

Our churches are ready-provided receptacles for Auto-Icons, – provided for all classes, – for rich and poor.

There would no longer be needed monuments of stone or marble, – there would be no danger to health from the accumulating of corpses, – and the use of churchyards would gradually be done away. (...) At Brighton, and other places on the sea-coast of England, the walls of houses are faced by globular pebbles, embedded in mortar; such a wall presents to the imagination an appearance not very different to that of a wall composed of head-length Auto-Icons. (...)

It would diminish the horrors of death, by getting rid of its deformities: it would leave the agreeable associations, and disperse the disagreeable. Of the de mortuis nil nisi bonum, it would be the best application: it would extract from the dead only that which is good, – that which would contribute to the happiness of the living.

It would set curiosity in motion, – virtuous curiosity. (...)

Entire museums of Auto-Icons would be formed.

